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Written testimony of Linda C. Degutis, DrPH, MSN on Raised Bill 5397:
AN ACT DECLARING GUN VIOLENCE A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS AND
ESTABLISHING THE OFFICE OF GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND ADVISORY
COUNCIL ON GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION.

Good afternoon Senator Kushner and members of the Public Health Committee, and thank you for this opportunity to speak in favor of Raised Bill 5397, which provides a major step forward in addressing the public health problem of gun violence in Connecticut. This bill includes several important provisions that can be used to decrease the toll of gun violence on individuals, families and communities in Connecticut.

Based on my experience and my career-long work in gun violence treatment and prevention at so many levels, I want to comment on the strengths of this bill, and how important it is for it to become law in Connecticut as a key component of the effort to prevent gun violence. Taking a public health approach to this problem is critical to change the focus from putting a band-aid on the problem, and sewing up the wounds of people who survive, while ignoring the true impact of gun violence. It is about going upstream, and figuring out how to stop the violence from occurring in the first place. It is also about work that involves a range of perspectives, including people who work to decrease the risk factors for gun violence, as the public health approach is broad rather than narrow.

Beginning with stating that gun violence is a public health crisis is important in that it doesn't take this issue and put the responsibility for it solely in the hands of law enforcement and criminal justice systems. Establishing an Office of Gun Violence Prevention with specific objectives and expectations sets up a process that can ensure that a true public health approach is taken. The requirements for data collection and dissemination, for evidence-informed community interventions and coordination of funding provide a strong basis for implementing effective strategies to prevent gun violence. Accurate and timely data will be crucial to the evaluation of impact of program initiatives, and to a useful research repository. Connecticut already participates in the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS), which is run by CDC and includes data on deaths due to gun violence. Its experience with this data collection system which includes law enforcement and the medical examiner's data, may aid in the design of the data systems that are mentioned.

The funding for community-based initiatives is crucial, as is inclusion of community representatives in order to ensure that evidence-informed strategies are adapted and implemented in ways that are relevant to, and accessible to the community. Optimally, these programs will focus on the upstream primary and secondary prevention strategies, rather than having a major focus on what to do after the violence has already occurred, because if that is all that is focused on, the violence will continue to occur, and people impacted by it may receive more access to the resources that they need, but there will be an ever-growing number of people who need the resources. While services and resources are important to people who

have been impacted by gun violence, only focusing on tertiary prevention (after the fact interventions), we do not have evidence that some of these interventions have a major impact on preventing future gun violence. With respect to secondary intervention, which would take place after the identification of risk factors for gun violence, there is evidence for the effectiveness of risk factor identification and intervention. For example, identifying risk factors such as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and a history violent behavior may be useful. Evaluation of the impact of interventions that are funded and implemented is a critical factor that needs to be included in any grants or funding mechanisms for programs to ensure that the programs are having the desired impact. Optimally, the initiatives that are put into place need to include the concept that as research and evaluation inform practice and programs, practice and programs need to inform research and evaluation. As any programs that are implemented are found to be effective, work to ensure their sustainability should be undertaken. In addition, the activities of the Office of Gun Violence Prevention, as well as the Advisory Committee, should be evaluated on a regular basis to ensure that it is working effectively.

As someone who has worked in emergency and trauma care, in inner city Chicago and in Bridgeport and New Haven, CT, and in public health as well as public policy, I have seen the impact of gun violence on families and communities, and on our country as whole. I worked in the emergency department at Yale New Haven Hospital and later worked with the trauma service at Yale as well as at Bridgeport Hospital, where we took care of people who were injured, and worked to support families of people who were killed, and where I directed the New Haven Regional Injury Prevention Program. I was an early member of CT Against Gun Violence. As a faculty member at Yale, I have taught students about the public health issue of gun violence and the public health approach to gun violence prevention. In 2010, I moved to Atlanta to become the director of the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the CDC, and was there when the Sandy Hook killings occurred, and when President Obama ordered that CDC restart its research on gun violence prevention. After leaving CDC, I worked at the Uniformed Services University for the Health Sciences, and also resumed teaching public health students at Yale about how to prevent injuries and violence including gun violence, a role that I continue to serve in. In addition, I work with researchers at the VA who are studying how to prevent gun suicide in veterans. I served as the chief Science Officer for The Avielle Foundation, which was founded by the parents of Avielle Richmond who was one of the students killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School. I also work with the American Public Health Association on efforts to prevent and decrease gun violence. This and my other work on gun violence prevention led to the publication of *Gun Violence Prevention: A Public Health Approach* in May 2021. From all of these efforts, it is clear that what is needed is identifying how we can keep people safe, given that there are guns in our communities.

In summary, based on my experience and knowledge of the field of gun violence prevention, I think that Raised Bill 5397 is an important and essential step in preventing gun violence in Connecticut, and a priority needs to be placed on primary and secondary prevention in taking a public health approach to preventing gun violence.